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ABSTRACT

Universities and colleges are increasingly being called upon to do something about the environment. Most have responded by adding a new program, a new institute or a course, but none of these additions has basically changed the university and its relationship to the community and the environment. The University of Wisconsin at Green Bay started operations in 1969 and is totally focussed on man and the environment, and on the concept of a communiversity. This means a socially responsible university relating to a socially responsible community. Its educational program differs in many ways from the traditional one. (1) There is true reciprocal relationship between the university and the surrounding community. (2) Teaching, research, and community outreach meld into a single intellectual function. (3) The focus on ecology and communiversity requires extensive and frequent contact between faculty and students outside as well as inside the classroom. (4) The UWGB approach requires considerable student initiative in learning. (5) The university is organized along pan-disciplinary and ecological problem lines; disciplines and professions are secondary. Students select an environmental problem that forms the center of his intellectual interests and then chooses courses in the various disciplines that contribute to his thinking and understanding of that problem. (AF)

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UNIVERSITIES AND THE ENVIRONMENT: THE UWGB CASE*

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The 1970's have been called the decade of the environment. This is the period of time when man is to become fully conscious of his responsibilities to the environment. He is to take the first major steps toward eliminating pollution of the environment. He is to launch massive new programs to put the environment to effective use, regulation, and preservation.

Increasingly, universities and colleges are being called upon to take dramatic action to help effectuate these changes. We read daily in the newspapers and in the newsletters associated with higher education that one college has adopted a new course, another college has created an institute, perhaps a third institution has launched a research project, a fourth is emphasizing extension programs -- all of which focus on problems of the environment, all of which are useful, but at the same time all of which are mere add-ons, and none of which basically change the nature of the university or its social role. It is for this reason that many critics of American higher education claim that the establishment goes on while the urgent needs of society such as those associated with man and his environment are ignored. It is for this reason that American universities seem to lack credibility. It is for this reason that many institutions are far removed from students at the same time that they are far removed from the communities that surround them.

The University of Wisconsin-Green Bay is a new institution. It was three years in the planning: From 1966 until 1969. We occupied our new main campus and launched our new academic plan in the fall of 1969. Superficially, it may appear as if the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay is like any other institution. We train chemists, biologists, physicists, and mathematicians. We train business administration specialists, elementary and secondary school teachers, artists, musicians, and actors. A student may select a foreign language, English, philosophy, or history. And all of the social sciences can be found as well. There is much that is familiar at UWGB.

Our country and the world need persons who have majors in areas such as these. But our country and the world need citizens as well -- citizens who are committed and dedicated to improving the lot of mankind on the planet earth. What good is a chemist if does not relate his life and his specialty to the broader needs of mankind? What good is a sociologist if he does not see the broad world perspective? And surely the narrow specialists in the fine arts are stunted when they do not know the world.

The University of Wisconsin-Green Bay is one of the few institutions in the United States that has a focus for all of its activities. Our focus is man and his environment. It is our aim to make every part of our program related to our ecological crises. Whether it is teaching, research, or community outreach, the focus of the

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University remains consistently that of helping student, professor, and community member to relate more effectively to the environment, and to do something about the environment.

We term our institution a communiversity. A communiversity is a socially responsible university relating to a socially responsible community. It conceives of the universe of a university as being the living breathing larger community of which it is a part.

Thus UWGB is based on two fundamental ideas namely, a focus on man and his environment and acceptance of the concept of a communiversity. As a consequence, UWGB has forged an educational program that departs from traditional paths.

First of all, there is a true reciprocal relationship between the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay and its surrounding community. University classrooms are not confined to the buildings on the campus. Students and professors study, observe, and work in the community. In turn, members of the community come into the classroom and interact with faculty and students. There can be no sharp division between town and gown in a communiversity. Teaching is related to problem-solving and decision-making in a context of relevance to ecological problems.

Secondly, teaching, research and community outreach meld into a single intellectual function. If one is studying pollution of a river or the decay of a downtown urban area, the functions of teaching, research, and community outreach are one. Members of the community, students, and professors participate together in the entire process. No longer need a University be divided into three warring camps -- those interested in undergraduate teaching, those interested in graduate work and research, and those interested in extension.

Thirdly, a focus on ecology and communiversity requires extensive and frequent contacts between faculty and students outside the classroom as well as inside. It means a joint search for solutions to some of man's most urgent problems, rather that a parroting of a second textbook in a lecture format, with the instructor disappearing once the class has come to an end.

Fourthly, UWGB's approach required considerable student initiative in learning, as well as initiative by faculty members. If students are to play a major role in our environmental struggle in the decades ahead, they must learn to sort their values out clearly, identify the major problems, get adequate information to relate to the problems and carry out a program of cooperative action. This very process should be that which epitomizes the learning process at a university.

Fifthly, the UWGB philosophy requires that a university must be organized to devote itself to ecological problems, rather than be imbued with the sanctity of individual disciplines and professions. At UWGB disciplines and professions are secondary, ecological problems are primary. In faculty hiring and faculty organization, there is little concern with the field of a professor's Ph.D. There is much concern with the kinds of ecological problems on which he wishes to focus, along with students and members of the community. Both the primary mode of faculty organization and the primary contours of a student's program are determined along pan-disciplinary and ecological problem lines.

At the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, a student selects an environmental problem that forms the center of his intellectual interests. It may be a problem of the bio-physical environment such as environmental control in regard to air,

water, land, natural resources or environmental engineering; it may be a problem associated with the social environment such as urban decay, regional planning,or the modernity process; it may be a focus on population dynamics, nutrition and the resource-population ratio, or the effect of environment on human development; and it may be an emphasis on human identity and its many diverse aspects as human beings are propelled into communication and action. If none of the formally stated ecological problems satisfy a student, he is invited to formulate his own environmental problem on which he wishes to concentrate.

The environmental problem then becomes the central point of relevance for a student's program. He chooses courses in the various disciplines and the various professions that contribute to thinking, problem-solving and decision-making in regard to the particular environmental problem. Thus chemistry, art, secondary school teaching, and psychology all of a sudden come alive. They are means to a social end. They relate one to another, as well as to the environmental problem. The world outside the university is just as relevant to a student's learning objectives as the world of books and classroom materials inside the university. Choices of off-campus experiences and on-campus community lectures are consequently made with this test of relevance in mind.

If the contemporary university is truly to be a socially responsible institution to encourage or contribute to the socially responsible individual and community, it must do far more than add a few courses, research projects, institutes, or extension programs. It must look to the very roots of the nature of its philosophy and organization internally, and to its interface with the larger community. Only then can it help fulfill the promise that the decade of the 70's will be that period of time when true compatibility emerges between man and his environment.